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Attorney General Biden, Legislators Propose Targeting False Statements to Law Enforcement Officers

Bipartisan group of former police officers sponsor legislation

Dover – Attorney General Beau Biden and a bipartisan group of lawmakers announced legislation today that will create a felony offense of providing false information to law enforcement officers.

Senate Bill 209, which is sponsored by Sen. Bruce Ennis, Rep. Larry Mitchell, Sen. David Lawson and Rep. Biff Lee, was introduced yesterday. Individuals who purposefully provide false information to police investigating a crime would be guilty of a Class G felony under the legislation and face the penalty of up to two years in jail. .

The federal government and other states have laws that punish those who lie to police officers. This legislation adds to Delaware's existing false reporting law by making it a crime to knowingly provide a false statement to law-enforcement in order to prevent, hinder or delay an investigation.

"I'm proud to be working with members of the General Assembly, some of whom are former police officers, to address this significant problem," Biden said.

"Government's most fundamental responsibility is to protect the public," Biden said. "Those who lie to police officers protect criminals, force law enforcement officers to waste valuable time and threaten public safety. I am proud to be working with former police officers in the legislature to address a significant problem that our police agencies confront every day."

Sen. Ennis, D-Smyrna, said the issue is a long-standing one and he hope the bill will make people think twice about lying to police and prosecutors during an investigation.

"I like the fact that we're tailoring this law to fit the crime instead of using a one-size-fits-all approach," said Ennis, a former state police officer. "The problem of people making false statements, for whatever reason, seems like it's been around as long as there's been crime. But I hope this makes people decide against making a false statement."

A retired New Castle County Police officer, Rep. Mitchell said that the legislation would help police officers gather truthful information to solve crimes.

"When police are investigating a crime, any misstep can be critical. If someone lies to police and sends them down the wrong path, an innocent person could be drawn into the investigation, or police might not catch the criminal," said Rep. Mitchell, D-Elsmere. "If a person intentionally lies to

police, law enforcement should have the ability to hold them accountable. My hope is that this new charge not only catches those who make false statements, but it also prevents others from making the same mistake. The end goal is fewer false statements, which will help police do their jobs more effectively.”

Sen. Lawson, a retired state trooper, said: “I feel that any false information given to the police hinders and prolongs the investigation which allows criminals to generate more victims in the meantime.”

Rep. Lee, R-Laurel, stated, “I am proud to be a prime sponsor of this important legislation. It’s a bill that is overdue and one that I believe will go a long way toward assisting law enforcement with their investigations. As a former State Police officer, I see the value in providing law enforcement with the tools that are needed in order to fight against anything that would obstruct justice. I applaud Senator Ennis and Rep. Mitchell for taking the lead on this legislation and I look forward to working with them and the Attorney General’s Office in getting the bill signed into law.”

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